

Testimony on House Bill 5408

Dear Energy Committee,

As a resident of New Haven, I am extremely concerned about what I see as a broad-brush approach in the Electric Utility's plan for enhanced trimming. In walking my own neighborhood, I was astonished. I read the utility plan and then walked several blocks with a tape measure, checking to see which trees would be eliminated following the document the utilities have written. My lovely neighborhood will be decimated as dozens of trees are either completely eliminated whether they are healthy or not, and many more will be trimmed so drastically that they may become unstable and dangerous. I suggest the following as a way to require the Utilities, UI and CL&P, to rethink their plan which takes no notice of the value that a healthy urban forest gives to a city and a neighborhood, such as increased property values, attractiveness, shade in summer (including lower air conditioning expenses!), and (amazingly!) controlling speed on streets! Studies have shown that drivers drive more slowly on streets with mature trees! In addition, I suggest the following:

1. There is nothing in the UI plan for annual review. I suggest semiannual review, including public comment and adjustment. This should be the responsibility of the Utilities, and results should be public published in a timely manner.
2. Utilities say it is enough to send a letter notifying property owners of plans to cut or trim. If home owners don't respond, that means the utility has their approval. What if letters are lost, incorrectly addressed, or people have moved and there are new owners? What if a property is a rental and the landlord doesn't care, but the tenants do? Do tenants have no chance to have input? I think utilities should have to get written approval, not just silence, to proceed.
3. In New Haven, there is a process for removing trees, including the New Haven arborist. This power should not somehow go to the utilities. A city should have the right to control its urban forest, including on city streets.
4. UI's document says they will grind stumps and replace trees, but only at their discretion. I think they should be expected and required to grind and replace, and the city and home owners should have some say in what the replacements are. UI only wants to follow a "right tree, right place" policy, but that seems to be limited to small ornamentals, some of which are not native or attractive, and will not grow to be mature, beautiful, shade-giving trees.
5. It's very hard to get through to the utilities on the phone, and emails are often not answered. There should be a direct, customer line, manned by enough people to provide someone to speak with for questions or complaints, within a reasonable wait period.
6. Local contractors should be given a chance to participate. I've spoken with a couple of local contractors who were not given a chance to bid on any of the work. Some have not heard that an out of state company from New York was given the work, which will total tens of millions of dollars, which I think should stay in CT, helping provide badly needed jobs and keeping more of

the money in CT. Also, there should be an annual performance review of how the trimming and cutting is going.

Last: Apparently, electric utilities are guaranteed a particular profit by the state. As a result, they surely should be held to a high standard of performance not only in how they deliver electric service, but also in terms of transparency with the public.

Yours,

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